

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE READJUSTMENT OF VETERANS

October 18-20, 2021
Virtual (WebEx Platform)
09:00AM – 5:00PM (EST)

MINUTES

Monday, October 18, 2021:

Attendees:

Committee Members Present:

Verdie Bowen, Sr., Chair
Erin Cook, MEd
Stephen Curda, PhD
David Duren, PhD
Michael Embrich, MA
Terry Schow
Thomas Hall, PhD
Jara Monetathchi
Gregg Orto
Jessica Dunn

Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:

Richard Barbato, Designated Federal Officer
Matthew Newman, Management & Program Analyst, Readjustment Counseling Service
Michael Fisher, Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling Service
Jessica Schiefer, Communications Officer, Readjustment Counseling Service
James Wartski, Veteran Experience Office
Paula P. Schnurr, Executive Director, VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Public Attendees:

Ellen Milhiser, Editor, Synopsis, emilhiser@yahoo.com

Adam Treece, American Legion National Office of Employment & Education,
atreece@legion.org

Sidath Viranga Panangala, Specialist in Veterans Policy, Team Lead Veterans Health and Benefits Issues, Congressional Research Service, SPANANGALA@crs.loc.gov

Opening Remarks:

At 09:00 a.m., Designated Federal Officer Richard Barbato welcomed the Committee members, initiated with housekeeping items, to include the WebEx platform, and the process involved in navigating. He invited members of the public to introduce themselves for the record.

Members of the public introduced themselves.

Committee Chair Verdie Bowen, Sr. called the Committee to order, and provided an overview of the meeting, introduced the thoughts for future meetings including one potential face-to-face session in January 2022 at two potential site visit locations to be determined.

Presentation:

DFO Barbato led the Committee in a review of the Committee Objectives and Charter. He also provided an overview of the Committee Report process moving forward.

Jessica Schiefer, Communications Officer for Readjustment counseling Service, provided an overview of the re-branding initiative, the strategy and methodology used, as well as graphics and multimedia employed, and the end-state achieved.

Questions from Committee members included:

- Impact of social media limitations?
- Partnerships to assist in spreading the word of the Vet Center?
- Partnerships with Department of Defense in engaging separating service members?

The committee recessed at 12:00 p.m.

The committee re-convened at 1:00 p.m.

Michael Fisher, Chief Officer, Readjustment Counseling service presented to the committee on eligibility expansion, RCS organizational footprint, counseling services being offered and national outreach operations. He then went on to review position description and functional statement standardization. He further covered the RCS educational incentive scholarship program, as well as the RCS training initiative.

Questions from Committee members included:

- Impact of CACREP certification?
- Impact of marketing on engagement in RCS services?
- Furnishings in each Vet Center, impact of furniture on comfortability?

The committee then adjourned for a ten-minute break.

The committee re-convened after the ten-minute break.

James Wartski from the Veteran Experience Office spoke to the vision and mission, as well as the Veteran customer experience journey line. He further covered community engagement initiative such as the Community Veteran Engagement Board (CVEB) program, as well as the Veteran Experience Action Center (VEAC), what the aim and objectives of the model are, and the desired end state.

Questions from Committee members included:

- Map of existing state level resources?

Paula Schnurr, PhD, Executive Director, VA Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), provided an overview of the work done by her organization. She shared the operational priorities: Biomarkers; PTSD and suicide; Treatment efficiency and engagement; Care delivery, models of care, and system factors; and Implementation. She provided members with examples of achievements including widely used PTSD assessment instruments, research first such as the first study showing structural brain changes in PTSD, their database of the world's published literature on trauma and PTSD, and mobile app development including *PTSD Coach* and treatment aids. She also noted the robust training and consultation program they manage, as well as their public-facing website which provides resources to providers, Veterans, family members and friends, and the general public.

Questions from Committee members included:

- Alternate treatment methods for PTSD, such as those relevant to the Native American Veteran population?
- Research on Medical Marijuana?
- Relationship between suicide and combat (or lack thereof)

Committee Chair Verdine Bowen re-capped the days presentations and covered what would be heard from the next day.

The Committee adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Tuesday, October 19, 2021:

Attendees:

Committee Members Present:

Verdie Bowen, Sr., Chair
Stephen Curda, PhD
David Duren, PhD
Michael Embrich, MA
Terry Schow
Thomas Hall, PhD
Jara Monetathchi
Gregg Orto
Joseph Anderson
Jessica Dunn

Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:

Richard Barbato, Designated Federal Officer
Carla Hill, TAP Curriculum Program Analyst
Matthew Newman, Management & Program Analyst, Readjustment Counseling Service
David Carroll, Executive Director, Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
Joseph Geraci, Transitioning Servicemember / Veteran and Suicide Prevention Center (TASC)

Public Attendees:

Ellen Milhiser, Editor, Synopsis, emilhiser@yahoo.com

Adam Treece, American Legion National Office of Employment & Education,
atreece@legion.org

Sidath Viranga Panangala, Specialist in Veterans Policy, Team Lead Veterans Health and Benefits Issues, Congressional Research Service, SPANANGALA@crs.loc.gov

Opening Remarks:

At 09:00 a.m., Designated Federal Officer Richard Barbato welcomed the Committee members, initiated with housekeeping items, to include the WebEx platform, and the process involved in navigating. He invited members of the public to introduce themselves for the record.

Members of the public introduced themselves.

Committee Chair Verdie Bowen, Sr. called the Committee to order, and provided a recap of the previous day's presentations, as well as an overview of the meeting agenda for the day.

Presentation:

DFO Barbato led the Committee in a review of the 21st report recommendations and spoke to the status of the 21st Report. DFO Barbato further reminded the committee that the meeting content would shape and drive the 22nd report, which the committee is charged with producing.

Carla Hill presented on the VA Transition Assistance Program (TAP) curriculum, covering the collaborative efforts between VA and the Department of Defense (DoD) in supporting transitioning service members, as well as transition curricula & activities, benefits and services, delivery modalities and the life cycle modules.

Questions from Committee members included:

- How are service members feeling with the content of the TAP curriculum?
- Any areas the committee can help out with to improve the program?
- Is there a variance with experiences of service members cycling through the TAP program at different installations?

The committee recessed at 12:00 p.m.

The committee re-convened at 1:00 p.m.

David Carroll provided an overview of the Veterans Healthcare Administration Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP). He went on to cover the mission, vision of excellence and the mental health continuum of care. He further spoke to the COVID response by the OMHSP and the pivot to tele-mental health. Finally, he covered the national response plan to the Afghanistan draw down and withdrawal.

Questions from Committee members included:

- Peer to peer program expansion?
- Concern over withdrawal of peer support from mental health programs?
- Future path of the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention?

Joseph Geraci spoke to the committee on the Transitioning Service Member and Veteran Sponsorship initiative. He detailed the evidence-based approach to promote connectedness with transitioning service members in order to mitigate reintegration difficulties. He further spoke to the importance of community in re-integration.

Questions from Committee members included:

- Where did the sampling cited come from regarding the program?
- Collaboration with the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs?

The committee then adjourned for a ten-minute break.

The committee re-convened after the ten-minute break.

Committee chair Verdie Bowen then lead the committee in a round-table discussion of the presentations the committee had received so far.

Committee Chair Verdie Bowen then covered what would be heard from the next day.

The Committee adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday, October 20, 2021:

Attendees:

Committee Members Present:

Verdie Bowen, Sr., Chair
Erin Cook, MEd
Stephen Curda, PhD
David Duren, PhD
Michael Embrich, MA
Terry Schow
Thomas Hall, PhD
Jara Monetathchi
Gregg Orto
Jessica Dunn

Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:

Richard Barbato, Designated Federal Officer
Matthew Newman, Management & Program Analyst, Readjustment Counseling Service

Public Attendees:

Ellen Milhiser, Editor, Synopsis, emilhiser@yahoo.com

Adam Treece, American Legion National Office of Employment & Education,
atreece@legion.org

Tiffany Ellett, Health Policy Coordinator, American Legion, tellett@legion.org

Sidath Viranga Panangala, Specialist in Veterans Policy, Team Lead Veterans Health and Benefits Issues, Congressional Research Service, SPANANGALA@crs.loc.gov

Committee Chair Verdie Bowen initiated the meeting by covering Verdie Bowen facilitated a brainstorming session to determine the four to five topics the Committee would like to focus on for the next committee report. The table below represents the items for consideration:

Access	Awareness	Treatment / Counseling / Readjustment Issues
Rural Health	Reservations & RCS <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access / Outreach	Mental Health <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural sensitivity
National Outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• RCS Access	Connection to Readjustment Counseling services
Native American Veterans in communities not connected to tribal land (Monetathchi)	Generational <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Get with the here and now” – Millennial connection	Employment & Readjustment
TAP Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Separating service members connected to Readjustment Counseling Services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Separating servicemembers connected with services to facilitate connection with Readjustment Counseling Services
Leveraging Contacts from the VEO/CVEB Program: Matching up counselors with community organizations with space	Department of Defense <ul style="list-style-type: none">• List of separating individuals, however, home of record doesn’t necessarily reflect where Veteran lands• State gets a copy of DD214 – also home of record – Alaska approximately half of letters sent to recently separated service members come back.• Email better way to reach out (also difficult because of the number of emails)• What are other ways to ID – look to private sector for guidance• “Moving upstream” of service-members separating from the Military.• Briefings need to be brought back to reality – no over sell<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current location	

Requests:

- Presentation from RCS Communications on National Outreach
- Presentation from the VA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics
- Presentation (Follow-Up) from VA Veteran Experience Office
- Site / Field Visit(s): Vet Center, VA Medical Center, DoD / VA TAP Program

The committee further discussed potential locations for their next meeting, as well as potential dates.

The committee adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Verdie C. Bowen SA
Verdie Bowen, Committee Chair

11-15-2021
Date